

Episode 211 - Cicero's On Ends - Book Two - Part 18 - Battle Of The Images

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I have to apologize to everyone that this episode is not out yet, because it contains I think some interesting material about a specific argument made by Cleanthes against pleasure on which I was hoping to get some input. Cleanthes had apparently constructed a mental image of a painting in which pleasure was in the center on a throne, and the virtues were her handmaidens waiting on her, and this was supposed to inspire revulsion among those who valued virtue. I think there are probably some very interesting aspects of this to discuss further, including perhaps some artwork over the intervening centuries putting into action Cleanthes' image, but we'll discuss that over time as we learn more about whether there is anything else to discuss. Here's the citation from XX! of Book 2:

Believe me, then, Torquatus, you cannot maintain your doctrines, if you once gain a clear view of your own nature and your own thoughts and inclinations; you will blush, I say, for that picture which Cleanthes used to paint, certainly very neatly, in his conversation. He bade his audience imagine to themselves pleasure painted in a picture as sitting on a throne, with most lovely raiment and queenly apparel; the virtues near her as her handmaidens, with no other employment, and no thought of other duty, than to wait upon pleasure, and merely to whisper in her ear (if only painting could convey such meaning) to guard against doing anything heedlessly, which might wound men's feelings, or anything from which some pain might spring. We virtues, indeed, were born to be your thralls; we have no other function.